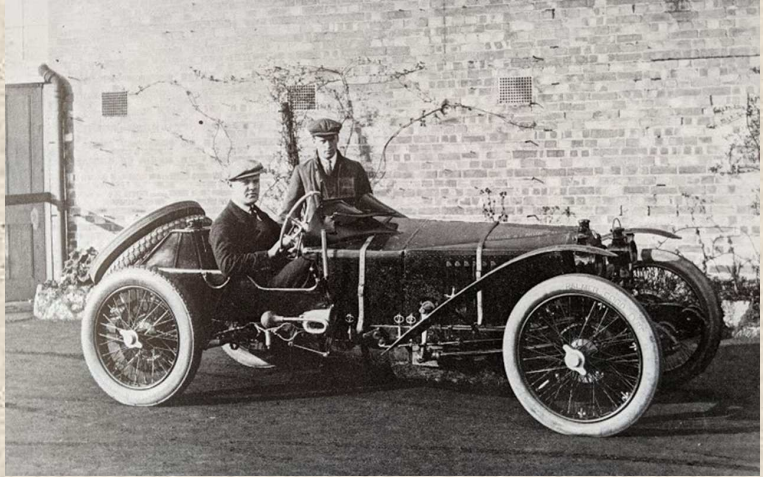


# 'GROC's Second Trilogy' (In Monthly Episodes) - Part 2

By Geoffrey O'Connell

(Continued from June Mag - Part 1)

If that was all there was to advise in respect of Humphrey Cook the information may well have been assigned to a footnote. However, there is more. Humphrey first married a Gillian Hedderly on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1926 and after some two years they had a son, William Wyndham Humphrey. Humphrey and Gillian were divorced in 1932. When he was



nigh on 48 years of age, on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1941, Humphrey married a divorcee. The lady in question was Anne Blakely, nee Moffett, who had been married to a Sheffield medical Doctor, John Blakely.

Blakely and Anne, after a stillborn daughter (1916), had four children – Derek Andrew Gustav (1918), John Brian (1920), Anne Maureen Maud and David Moffat Drummond (1929). In 1932 the Doctor took to himself a lover, a Phyllis Staton, at which time Blakely was 49 and the young lady was 25. Phyllis was found a room in a rented house. Unfortunately, the inevitable outcome occurred in January 1934 when Phyllis became pregnant.

Towards the end of February, she crashed through the back door of her parent's home in a very poor condition and a few days later died in hospital from blood poisoning. It became apparent that she had had a miscarriage about 5 to 10 days earlier. Not unnaturally the police arrested Dr Blakely and charged him with murder, reasoning that he had assisted in her abortion.

Dr Blakely's trial began on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1934. Despite all the toing and froing, the magistrates decided the evidence against the Doctor was insufficient to secure a conviction and dismissed the case. That affair was the '*final nail in the doctor's marriage coffin*' and Anne's divorce became absolute in December 1940. In it she was granted custody of their children and it is reported that they left Sheffield for Buckinghamshire.

In that which appears a rather short period of time, on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1941 Humphrey Wyndham Cook married Anne at Caxton Hall Registry Office, Westminster, London. During WW2 Humphrey became a King's Messenger which he was able to do as he had joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1916. The RFC was then the air arm of the British Army and Messengers were very often appointed from retired Army officers. Messengers are the chaps who hand-deliver important and secretive documents to the various British outposts throughout the world. Incidentally Humphrey was discharged from the RFC in 1917 'due to sickness'.

The youngest offspring of Anne Blakely was David who was to almost all those who knew him considered to be a frightful, self-centred, unpleasant, arrogant cad.

He played around with motor racing in the 1950s, as he did with women. Unluckily for him one of those ladies was Ruth Ellis who he treated rather unpleasantly. Sufficient to report that on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1955 Ruth shot and killed him with a .38 calibre revolver outside The Magdala Pub, South Hill Park, Hampstead, London.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> June she appeared at the Number One Court of the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales, situated close by St Paul's Cathedral, Central London.

The jury took just twenty minutes to find her guilty of murder. She was the last woman to be hanged in the United Kingdom.

In 1934 the first ERA (R.1., later renamed R.1.A.) was viewed by the press and some members of the public at the Brooklands Circuit on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May. \*

The car's first race was at the British Empire Trophy Race, Brooklands, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June at which it finished. That was followed by R.1. appearing at the Circuit de Dieppe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July which race was ended by a broken rocker arm. There followed the BARC August Bank Holiday meeting at Brooklands where Humphrey Cook won the Second Esher Handicap event in R.2., at that time fitted with a 1088cc engine. At the same meeting, in the Last Mountain Handicap, he spun on lap 3 with malfunctioning brakes.

*\*The six-cylinder 1½ litre unit was a supercharged 1488cc engine with a camshaft on each side of the unit. The 1100cc engine had a cubic capacity of 1088cc and the rare 2 litre that of 1980cc.*



**Ruth Ellis**

Subsequently various record-breaking attempts and appearances in R.1., R.2. and R.3 were made at Shelsley Walsh, Donington Park and Brooklands. It was announced that the 1088cc ERA would cost £1,500.00 \* and the 1488cc car £1,700.00. In comparison a single seater supercharged Maserati 4CM (straight 4, dohc, 1088cc engine) was priced at £915.00 in Great Britain. There's competitive.

Towards the end of 1934 'The White Riley' was returned to the Riley Company and over the ensuing years it was competed in by the likes of Christopher (Chris) Staniland and Kay Petre. In 1935 the ERAs were making a large impression on the motor racing public and production of a B type ERA commenced. There was negligible difference between an A and B type product. For 1936 seven ERAs were manufactured, six of which were for sale to private owners.



Additionally, news of the C Type model appeared which would be powered by a 1½ or 2 litre engine units and were, in fact, formulated from three ex B Types - namely R4B, R8B and R12 B. The antecedents of this, that and the other ERAs can be very confusing even to the dedicated expert and as I am an 'inpert' .....! In 1937 ERA decided not to manufacture anymore cars for sale. That year the D Type appeared which was actually based on R4B which was



originally R4C! At about this stage I find it best to lie down with a glass or three of Merlot and have a rest. As a possible reader I am sure you will be experiencing the same symptoms.

It was in that year that two new racing circuits were added to Donington Park, namely Crystal Palace, not surprisingly in the Crystal Palace region of South London, and the construction of a road circuit within the original Brooklands oval track. Year 1938 was that in which ERA won its last international Voiturette Race on the 12<sup>th</sup> June at the Grand Prix de Picardie, Peronne, Hauts-de-France, Northern France.



Towards the end of that year the portents of a European war were becoming increasingly evident. Then it was 1939, the year in which the last European Voiturette Race took place at the Swiss GP held at Bremgarten, Berne on the 20<sup>th</sup> August.

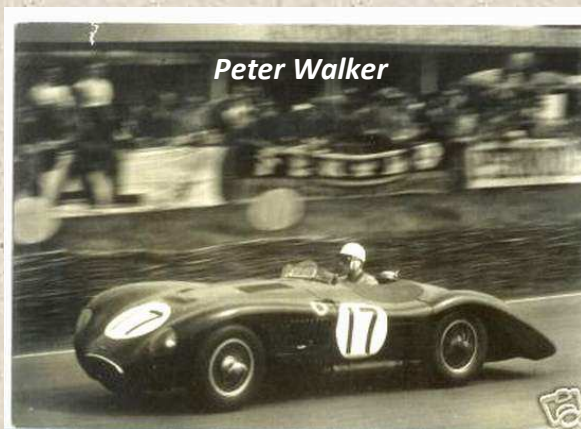
*\*In today's money that purchase price of £1,500.00 for an 1088cc ERA would be some £114,386.00.*

The final British motor race to be staged before the onset of WW2 was the Road Racing Club's Imperial Trophy Race held at Crystal Palace on the 26<sup>th</sup> August.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939 Germany invaded Poland and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September Great Britain declared war on Germany. In 1940 the Italians decided it was motor racing as usual, holding the Gran Premio di Tripoli for Voiturette Racing on the 12<sup>th</sup> May. Only Italian racing drivers and Italian racing cars (Alfa Romeo and Maserati) entered the event which was won by Giuseppe Farina aboard a supercharged Alfa Romeo 158 (straight 8, 1479cc). It may be of interest that two days prior to the Tripoli GP, Germany had invaded Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. The last European Voiturette motor race was the XXXI Targa Florio staged on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May at Favorita Park, Palermo, Italy. It was also only entered by Italian drivers and cars, the latter solely being Maserati's.

The winner was Luigi Villoresi driving a Maserati 4CL. On the 10<sup>th</sup> June Italy declared war on Great Britain and France. Well, at least they arrived, if somewhat late.

A constant motor racing companion in racing cars owned by Peter Whitehead was one Peter Douglas Conyers 'Skid' Walker (7<sup>th</sup> October 1912-1<sup>st</sup> March 1984). He was born at Huby Village, Yorkshire, some 51 miles/82kms north-east of Bradford City – Peter Whitehead's birthplace. Peter Walker is very often described as a farmer but quite where he commenced that activity is not clear. He is referred to as a farmer from Shobdon Court, Herefordshire but that occurred between 1950 and 1957.



The meeting of the two Peter's may well have been whilst Whitehead was pursuing the family wool business, which would have been possible if Walker was a sheep farmer. Whatever .....in descriptions of him he is almost always referred to as an 'English Racing Driver' and at that he was very, very good. Competing in Whitehead's cars, Peter Walker is mentioned in 1935 when Whitehead was performing in his Alta. That was at the 13<sup>th</sup> April Donnington Park race meeting where Walker is listed as coming third in the 5 lap Scratch race for vehicles fitted with up to 1500cc engines. Later in the day Whitehead raced in Heat 1 of the 25-mile/40kms Handicap event for cars with engines up to 3500cc but was unplaced. Next up for the duo was the Donnington Park Meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> May.

Walker was unplaced in the 5-lap event up to 1500cc. Whitehead raced in a subsequent 1500cc Scratch Race but was unplaced, as he was in the 25-mile/40kms Handicap event for cars up to 3500cc. On the 18<sup>th</sup> May at the Shelsley Walsh Hillclimb, Whitehead achieved a first in the 1100cc Sports Race. At Donnington Park on the 13<sup>th</sup> July Whitehead had to retire due to 'broadsiding off at Starkey's' on about Lap 7 or 8 in the 150mile/241kms, 80 Lap Nuffield Trophy Handicap Race for vehicles up to 1500cc.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> August, there was another meeting at Donnington Park. Whitehead was unplaced in the 12½ mile/20kms, 5 Lap Handicap event, whilst Walker was possibly 4<sup>th</sup> in the 12½ mile up to 1500c Scratch Race. Lastly Whitehead was unplaced in the 25-mile/40kms Handicap Race for up to 3500cc engines cars. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1936 Whitehead appeared in the Inter-Varsity Speed Trials held at Syston Park Hillclimb in a 4-seater sports tourer Light Six MG L1 Magna (6 cylinder, sohc, 1086cc engine). He achieved a 1<sup>st</sup> in Class B. From now on in the years prior to WW2, as far as Peter Whitehead and Peter Walker were concerned it was all ERA (R10B.) motor racing. Peter Whitehead and Peter Walker's second race meeting driving the ERA was at the Derby and District Motor Club Meeting at Donington Park on the 9<sup>th</sup> May. Whitehead finished third in a 5 Lap Handicap race for cars powered by engines up to 1500cc, Walker finished second in a similar event, whilst Whitehead spun and was unplaced in the last race of the day, namely a Ten Lap event for cars fitted with engines up to 5000 cc. Other notable contestants at that meeting included: Richard J.B. Seaman; B. Bira – that was his '*nom de course*' – his actual name and title being Prince Birabongse Bhanudej/Prince Bira of Siam (now Thailand); and Reginald 'Reg' Parnell. During those pre-war years fellow contestants included Earl Howe and Raymond Mays – as they would.

Following that 9<sup>th</sup> May meeting from thereon it was one race meeting after another for four years. Circuits including: Donington Park; Limerick in what was known as Southern Ireland but is now the Republic of Ireland; Phoenix Park, Dublin - located as for Limerick; Brooklands; Crystal Palace; Monza, Milan, Italy; the Grand Prix de Picardy at Peronne, France; the IOM; Shelsley Walsh Hillclimb; the Florence street circuit, Italy; the Mount Panorama Circuit, Bathurst, Australia; and the Prince George, East London and the Pollsmoor, Cape Town circuits, South Africa. I have singled out one or three rather exceptional events and overseas visits up until WW2. For 1938 Peter Whitehead elected to combine a business trip in respect to the family business with motor racing his ERA R10B. in Australia - and why not?



*Earl Howe in Mercedes - 1930*

Regarding his sporting interests, his first event was the Australian Grand Prix, Mount Panorama, Bathurst, New South Wales on the 18<sup>th</sup> April.

That race was organised by the Light Car Club of New South Wales and finally attracted 30 starters. The circuit was 3.84 miles/6.17kms long, was then a dirt track and the contestants had to endure 40 laps, giving an overall raced distance of some 153 miles/247kms.

It was a Formula Libre handicap event and Whitehead's ERA started on Scratch. However, he beat the handicap and won the event outright.



*Raymond Mays in his Bugatti Brescia—  
Wales 1922*

© National Motor Museum Queensland

He also achieved the fastest lap and of course the fastest race time. During the race the ERA suffered from stones interfering with the brake air scoops and rocks damaging the brake rods. He raced bare headed so that he could hear the engine tone and was wearing a dark blue shirt, a monogrammed tie, and grey slacks. It was recounted by some bystanders that as the celebrations progressed after the race, Whitehead stripped to his bare fundamentals, set light to his clothes in the main street, close by the Council Chambers, and became involved in a food fight. Well, a chap's a chap for all that.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> June Peter Whitehead took part in the annual Canberra Speed Trials held on Northbourne Avenue. The event featured ½ mile/.8kms long timed Standing and Flying starts along the then rural road. He claimed to have reached 130mph in the Flying ½ mile but unfortunately the meeting was dogged by a malfunctioning timing machine. Despite that faulty device, Peter was declared the winner. To make the next week's meeting, it was necessary to run-in newly installed engine parts. It was decided to lorry transport ERA R10B from Canberra to Albury where the ERA was hoisted off the vehicle by a railway yard crane. Peter then drove the ERA the rest of the way to Melbourne, in part on the Old Hume Highway.

Due to the very high fuel consumption of the supercharged engine (between 2 and 4mpg), a fuel tank capacity of 28 gallons and some half of the 422 miles/680kms journey to be driven, Shell Fuel had to meet up at the railway township of Seymour to refuel the car with methanol. A report advised that the ERA was detained for a short period due to that escapade as of course the car was not road legal.

The next event, held on the 13<sup>th</sup> June, was the Rob Roy Hillclimb, sponsored by the Light Car Club of Australia. The then unsealed track was some 32 miles/52km north-east of Melbourne and was 760 yards/695 metres in length.

Peter Whitehead gained FTD (fastest time of the day). Due to Whitehead's continuing campaigning in Australia in 1938, at first, and for that matter a second glance, there would appear to be a conflict of information in respect of his whereabouts. The ERA 'bible' details Peter Whitehead as being unplaced in the Siam (Challenge) Trophy Race of the BARC Closed Meeting held at Brooklands on the 15<sup>th</sup> October that year.

However, around that date he was detailed as motor racing at: 90 Mile Beach, Woodside, near Yarram, Victoria on the 4<sup>th</sup> September; at Aspendale Speedway, Melbourne in October; and at Paramatta Park GP, Sydney on the 5<sup>th</sup> November.

Following which he is detailed as competing in South Africa on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1939. Inspection of another 'fount of all knowledge' in respect of Motor Racing and that Brooklands meeting does not list Peter Whitehead of even having retired. That reference work lists all contestants even if they have not finished a race for whatever reason.



*Peter Whitehead - Silverstone 1950*

*Grumpy Geoffrey*

*Continued as part 3 in August Magazine*